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DESEGREGATING CITY SCHOOLS.

BY- FISCHER, JOHN H.

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THE STRUGGLE FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY DEMANDS DIRECT CONFRONTATION OF THE PROBLEM, DETERMINED AND ABLE LEADERSHIP BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, AND COORDINATION OF COMMUNITY AND AGENCY SUPPORT. THE LACK OF FIRST-RATE SCHOOLS IN NEGRO COMMUNITIES AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT UPON THE INDIVIDUAL ATTENDING A SCHOOL WHERE EVERY PUPIL RECOGNIZES THAT HIS GROUP IS VIEWED AS LESS ABLE, SUCCESSFUL, AND ACCEPTABLE EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR A MORE FAVORABLE BALANCE OF RACES IN THE SCHOOLS. THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION IS NOT PRIMARILY TO RAISE QUANTITATIVE INDICES OF NEGRO SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT, BUT RATHER TO ALTER THE CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES ALL CHILDREN CAN ENJOY, TO PROVIDE THEM WITH EQUAL INCENTIVES TO SUCCEED, AND TO FOSTER A SENSE OF INTERGROUP ACCEPTANCE. CREATION OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM WHICH WILL ASSURE EVERY PUPIL EQUAL ACCESS TO EXCELLENT INSTRUCTION IS A COMMUNITY TASK INVOLVING (1) IMAGINATIVE, BOLD APPRAISAL OF WHAT A WELL-STAFFED, WELL-SUPPORTED, AND WELL-INTEGRATED PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM WOULD MEAN TO THE COMMUNITY, (2) PROJECTION OF THE ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES, (3) ESTIMATION, ADAPTATION, AND SCHEDULING OF THE RESOURCES REQUIRED, AND (4) WILLINGNESS OF ALL CONCERNED TO MAKE AND TO MEET COMMITMENTS OF POLICY, RESOURCES, AND ACTION. THIS DOCUMENT WAS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE, SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE AND TEACHERS COLLEGE OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY (NEW YORK, JUNE 17, 1966). (HM)

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DESEGREGATING CITY SCHOOLS

John H. Fischer
President, Teachers College
Columbia University

Assuring all American children equal access to good education has never been easy, and it is not easy now, but the conditions in which the effort must be carried forward are vastly more favorable now than they have been. For one thing, in both our own country and the rest of the world the attitude toward education is more serious--one might almost call it more desperate--than ever before. A generation ago when George Counts asked, "Dare the schools build a new social order?" the question was considered as little more than the extravagant language of a visionary liberal. Whatever it was the country needed in the depths of the depression, few expected to find it in the schools.

But that depression itself, the wars that followed, the technological revolution, and now, most recently, a massive and world-wide social upheaval have put a different face upon the matter.

President Johnson summarized the shift when he said that "one great truth" he had learned is that "the answer for all of our national problems, the answer for all the problems of the world comes down when you really analyze it to one simple word--education." In one sense the President only echoes in his own words what all his predecessors have said in theirs about the dependency of democracy on popular education, but Mr. Johnson is not content merely to talk about that relationship. Sensing and leading the mood of the country, he has made the improvement of education and the extension of access to it a cornerstone of his entire domestic policy, and, most recently, has proposed also a strong new program of international education.

The significance of what has happened since the end of World War II and particularly since 1954 is that we have begun seriously to consider the full implications of the relationship between democracy and education in more than institutional terms. We are facing up squarely to the fundamental proposition that to limit a man's education is to limit his freedom. This is what the problem of school desegregation in its broadest meaning is all about.

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What is required, therefore, is much more than the mere proclamation of a new policy of equality. To be sure, the educational opportunities of Negro Americans must be equalized with those of their white neighbors, but equalization must be accompanied by prompt and vigorous action to improve the Negro's access to those opportunities and, further, to increase the inducement most Negroes now have to use the opportunities. Until, in all three respects, the American of Negro ancestry enjoys full parity with his white neighbor, the Negro citizen will inevitably continue to depress the composite level of American society, and that society will continue to depress his standing as a man.

In a world in which education is essential to virtually every form of social, economic, political, and personal advancement, it is pointless to argue that the schools need only follow the lead of other segments of society. The schools will perform their functions more effectively, of course, if they enjoy the support of a favorable community climate, but the absence of such a climate can never be considered an adequate excuse for the schools' failure to stand for what is educationally sound and morally defensible. Those charged with the leadership of educational policy and practice carry a very special responsibility. But those who lead other important segments of public and private activity bear comparable obligations to support school board members and the professional educators when they offer sound leadership.

In approaching the educational task, it may be well to consider some salient facts. One is that a school which enrolls largely Negro students is almost universally considered to be of lower status and less desirable than one that is attended wholly or mainly by white students. Regardless of the quality of the building, the competence of the staff, or the size of classes, a school composed of three fourths Negro children and one fourth white children is viewed by both races, almost without exception, as inferior to one in which the proportions are reversed. Whether such appraisals are valid remains, at least for the present, beside the point. The schools that are known as Negro schools are so often inferior in fact that such generalized attitudes must be expected to persist even though good schools can occasionally be found in Negro neighborhoods. The point is that genuinely first-rate schools in Negro communities have been so scarce that anyone who wishes to demonstrate that an institution known as a Negro school can produce first-rate results must be prepared to accept a substantial burden of proof. A second fact closely related to this first one is the unfortunate psychological effect upon the individual child of belonging to a school where every pupil knows that, regardless of his personal attainments, the group with which he is identified is viewed as less able, less successful, and less acceptable than the majority of the community. This impact upon the self-image and motivation of the child is perhaps the most tragic outcome

of segregated education. It emphasizes the dual need for immediate steps to achieve wherever possible a more favorable balance of races in the schools and for strenuous efforts to upgrade to full respectability and status every school in which enrollment cannot soon be balanced.

The action of the Supreme Court in striking down the legal basis of segregation in 1964 marked the climax of an obviously necessary first campaign, but the new problems which followed the Brown decision are even more complex than those which preceded it. The task now is not only to end segregation but to correct the effects it has produced. It is useless to debate whether de jure or de facto segregation is the worse evil. It was the consequences of the fact of segregation that convinced the Supreme Court that "separate schools are inherently unequal" and led the Court to strike down the laws supporting such schools. To argue now that although the statutes have been declared unjust the fact is acceptable requires a curious twist of logic indeed.

It would be irresponsible, however, to attempt to deal with a problem so deeply rooted in practice and custom and so often due to causes beyond the school's control without taking full account of its complexity. No solution is likely to be effective unless it is based on a realistic appraisal of the forces and factors involved. Yet however complicated the situation or its final solutions may be, the clearly essential first step is a firm and forthright confrontation of the problem.

Some of the bitterest attacks on school authorities have been brought on not so much by the failure to integrate every school as by their apparent unwillingness to accept racial integration as a desirable educational goal. To justify this position, the argument is offered that the only acceptable policy is simple and complete non-discrimination, that unless the school is color-blind the spirit of the Brown decision and the fourteenth amendment is violated. What this approach overlooks or attempts to evade is that the consequences of earlier discrimination cannot be ended merely by ceasing the practices that produced them. Without corrective action the earlier effects will inevitably persist. The equal treatment of unequals, it was pointed out long ago, produces neither equity nor justice.

A second justification commonly offered for not taking positive action to integrate schools is the lack of evidence that better racial balance leads to better learning. It must be conceded that solid, objective evidence on this question is difficult if not impossible to find. But even if sound statistical data were available, they could not be expected to furnish per se an adequate basis for policy. The purpose of

school integration is not merely or even primarily to raise the quantitative indices of scholastic achievement among Negro children, although such gains are obviously desirable. The main objective is rather to alter the character and the quality of the opportunities all children can enjoy, to provide them equally with incentives to succeed, and to foster a sense of intergroup acceptance in ways that are impossible when schools or students are racially, culturally, and socially isolated. The simplest statement of the situation to which school policy must respond is that few American Negro children now can grow up under conditions comparable to those available to the vast majority of white children. Of all the means for improving this situation that are subject to public control the most powerful is the public school. The Negro child must have a chance to be educated in a school where it is clear not only to him but to everybody else that he is not segregated and where his undisputed right to membership is acknowledged by his peers and by his elders of both races.

The most important social policies, including quite particularly educational policies, have never been based on scientific evidence but on a sense of what is equitable, just, and morally right. Our system of universal education was established not because research showed that the country would profit from it but because we were committed to the principles of equal opportunity and personal fulfillment. Our now widespread programs of special education for mentally and physically handicapped children were established not for scientific but for humanitarian reasons. Every major policy decision affecting education has been taken on grounds of its moral, social, and political desirability. It is after policy action is taken that science, technology, and professional skill are called upon to devise the most efficient and effective procedures for translating purpose into practice.

To be sure, some important gains in learning may come rather quickly in newly integrated schools, but lasting changes in the deep-seated behavior patterns of children and parents of both races cannot realistically be expected to occur overnight. What a school has to boast about at the end of the first grading period after integration is far less important than what happens to the quality of living in America during the next generation. Of course school integration will be more effective when parallel improvements are made in the housing, the economic opportunities, and the general social condition of Negro Americans, but the absence of adequate effort elsewhere only increases the urgency that prompt and energetic action be taken by the school.

The effort to identify and define de facto segregation has led to the concept of racial balance. While no single ratio of races can be established as universally right, there is no doubt that when the number or

proportion of Negro children in a school exceeds a certain level, the school becomes less acceptable to both white and Negro parents. The point at which that shift begins is not clear, nor are the reasons for the variation adequately understood, but the results that typically follow are all too familiar: an accelerated exodus of white families, an influx of Negroes, increased enrollment, frequently to the point of overcrowding; growing dissatisfaction among teachers; and the replacement of veterans by inexperienced or unqualified junior instructors.

There are no fully satisfactory measures of segregation or imbalance but several tests are applicable. The simplest is to ask whether a particular school is viewed by the community as a Negro school. Whether the school is assumed to belong to a Negro neighborhood or merely to be the one that Negroes "just happen" to attend, whether it has been provided especially for a Negro population or has gradually acquired a student body disproportionately composed of Negroes, the typical consequences of segregation can be predicted.

In gauging the degree of segregation or imbalance, the percentage or number of Negro students in a given building is ordinarily less important than the relation of the school to the entire system of which it is a part. It is not the numbers involved, but the substantial isolation of Negro and white students from each other which implies differences in status and prevents the association that is the indispensable basis for mutual understanding and acceptance.

The problem of definition and the establishment of formulae cannot be wholly avoided, but these are less important matters than creating and retaining student bodies that will be considered acceptably integrated by the largest possible number of persons in both races. Universal approval of any such scheme represents unobtainable perfection, but no plan for integration can be sustained unless it is supported by substantial elements of both the majority and the minority.

The plain fact is that there can be no integration without pupils of different races. Any plan, therefore, which increases the movement of white pupils out of the public schools will defeat the purpose it is intended to serve. On the other hand, unless the plan advances the process of integration at a realistic rate it is certainly futile and probably illegal.

A number of administrative procedures for promoting school integration has been devised and each has some merit. The free choice plan, the so-called Princeton plan for pairing schools, the comprehensive reorganization of attendance areas and feeder patterns all are applicable and useful in certain situations.

The most promising--and the boldest--scheme yet proposed for achieving a more durable balance of races in public schools is the educational park, which would assemble on a single large site children from an attendance area broad enough to include a substantial number of both majority and minority children. It would also make possible the diversity of program and the concentration of services needed to serve a widely varied student body. The educational park requires, however, a radical departure from past practice and major commitments of space, money, and program direction.

Yet another approach now being discussed but not yet tried is the merger or redefinition of entire school districts. The purpose is to counteract the effect of arbitrary lines that often deny children access to schools that they might otherwise attend. One sentence in the Brown decision seems to bear directly on this problem: "Such an opportunity [to obtain an education], where the State has undertaken to provide it," the Supreme Court said, "is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms."

When a boundary separating school districts results in obvious educational inequity, it seems pertinent to ask whether the State, which drew the line, is not required to erase it or redraw it if such action is necessary to establish the "equal terms" to which the Court referred.

It is not my purpose to discuss any of these approaches in detail, but rather to emphasize that there is no single plan, no magic key by which instant integration can be achieved. No one familiar with the reality of the problem could for one moment believe that there is a panacea, nor could anyone acting in good faith promise to deliver one.

What is required is neither insistence on a particular method nor resistance to it, but rather a common and resolute willingness to face up to the urgency to end the destructive divisiveness that still plagues too many of our communities, and to search for solutions with open minds and dedicated inventiveness. Such determination is obviously easier to describe than to obtain. We are dealing with long-standing prejudices, established practices, and deep-seated apprehensions. But it must be made clear to all our people that we cannot expect to attain our full strength as a democracy while any group of our citizens is denied free and complete access to the benefits which are the proper birthright of our entire people.

One friend of mine well experienced in this field claims that there are no hard barriers to the attainment of school integration but rather a vast and dense fog that delays and frustrates effective action. I think he is right, and I am convinced that this cloud of uncertainty, insecurity, fear, and plain inertia will be dispelled only where the necessary leadership is forthcoming. This is not to say that one or a few firm-minded

individuals can work a miracle. It is rather to argue that the broad-scale public understanding and support which are needed cannot be expected to develop until a nucleus of intelligent, well-informed, and capable leaders accepts the responsibility for clarifying the issues, illuminating the possibilities, and proposing forthright action.

Much of that leadership, for both legal and psychological reasons, must be furnished by school boards and superintendents. Although every member of the school staff has an indispensable part to play, those who have the duty to set top policy and to see that it is carried out must be able and willing to project the goals and the programs by which they are to be attained.

But even the ablest and most dedicated school board and staff cannot successfully mount any educational program without the support of substantial and powerful elements in the community. The creation of a public school system that will assure every pupil equal access to excellent instruction is not the business solely of the school authorities. It must be approached rather as a task of comprehensive community planning in which many public and private agencies will be involved.

It must begin with an imaginative and bold appraisal of what a first-rate system of public schools, well staffed, well supported, and well integrated, might plan in the social, economic, and cultural advancement of the community. A second step will be to project the parts that agencies other than the schools can play in the total effort, to identify their roles, and to determine how their work and the schools' can best be interrelated. A third step is to estimate the resources required in manpower, facilities, and money; to adapt the magnitude of the effort to the resources available; to schedule the timing of development to the predictable flow of resources, and to maintain at every phase a balanced plan of operation. The fourth and possibly the most important part of such an approach must be the willingness of all concerned to make and to meet commitments of policy, resources, and action. What I am proposing would mean for many organizations a new relationship to the public schools, and it would require on the part of some school systems a quite different posture toward the community. It would entail a sharp departure from the tradition of autonomy that has characterized much of school administration since the turn of the century. The relative independence of public schools from other governmental and private agencies, although a rational and wise response to the hazards of partisan political control has in some places separated the schools too sharply from other community concerns.

The fact that the public schools belong to the people and are established to serve the public interest imposes obligations on the people as well as the schools. In the past many groups and individuals have expressed their interest in public education chiefly in the form of criticism, finding fault with what was being done, and attacking those whom they held accountable for error. Others have seen the schools as instruments for promoting their own special interests and have not hesitated to apply heavy pressure to shape the school to conform to their own predispositions. Any public agency, and the schools most particularly, must expect criticism and pressure. The best of them do expect it, welcome it, and frequently are able to use it in constructive ways. But while every institution, for its own good and for the public interest, needs external criticism, no sound institution has ever been built by criticism alone.

What is called for now is a new coordination of community support for the schools and their purposes, a clearer identification of the common interests of a wide variety of organizations and forces, and a deliberate effort on the part of all such forces and agencies to bring their collective influence and resources to bear, not in competition for control of the school but in cooperation to support it.

It goes without saying that if this is to happen, labor and industrial establishments must become vigorous participants in the process. The relationship between strong schools and a strong economy is often talked about but too seldom taken with complete seriousness by business leaders and major taxpayers. Despite genuine progress in smaller communities where forward-looking industrial corporations view the improvement of schools as a necessary and desirable long-range investment, in the larger cities such constructive interest is more notable for its absence than its presence. The time has come for the business leaders in the metropolitan centers to appraise realistically the relation between high quality schools for all children and the long-term well-being of the city.

But it will be necessary for other groups also to become major participants in educational development. I think here particularly of the civil rights groups, which have especially powerful contributions to make. In the past many of these groups, too, have used their energy chiefly to point out what was wrong and have refused to join forces with school people to establish and support more promising programs. The groups in our society that are most concerned about promoting equality of opportunity must be willing to turn from the easier task of criticism to the much more difficult but less spectacular duty of helping to build the institutions and programs that are required. This calls for a readiness to temper dramatic demands for special attention with a broader

awareness of the total community interest. It requires recognition of the common obligation of all citizens and all groups to share the duty to maintain public institutions at the same time that they exercise the right to criticize them.

I speak of this relationship here because the part that the Urban League has played in the support of public education might well serve as a model for other community groups. My specific suggestion now is that this gathering be used as a beginning point from which further action might be taken to mobilize community resources, to identify the problems that must be met, and to lay out the steps needed to achieve high quality integrated schools and to assure every pupil free and equal access to them.

No city in this country can reasonably expect its future as a place to live to be any better than the education its young people are receiving today. Any school system that subjects part of its children to the repression and indignity of ghetto schools while others are given the stimulation and security of a sound school environment is only accumulating further trouble for the future. The correction of such inequities must have the highest priority among the tasks of the schools and on the agenda of the school board and every other governmental agency and private group that can help.

The time for action is now. A substantial part of the necessary leadership is in this room. The question for all of us is what we mean to do about it.